

# Novice led Mother Teresa's Missionary Brothers of Charity

**B**rother Andrew, who as a novice brother founded the Missionary Brothers of Charity with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, died in Melbourne earlier this month.

Br Andrew, an Australian, was founder and General of the Missionary Brothers of Charity from 1967 to 1986.

He began his religious life as a Jesuit priest in Australia, but left the Jesuits in the early 1960s after visiting Calcutta, in India, where Mother Teresa had her mission. Wanting to be involved in the same work, he found himself taking on the leadership of the then-fledgling Brothers of Charity as Mother Teresa could not head a male religious order. The brothers numbered just 12 at this stage.

Br Andrew led the brothers for the next 20 years, guiding them as they developed into a full-fledged organisation with houses spread throughout India and the rest of the world.

In recent years, Br Andrew attracted a wide following because of his reputation as a spiritual director. This developed as a result of the numerous talks he gave and retreats he organised.

His rejection of the holiness label "was not something pious", Fr Day said. "He rejected all forms of showiness and, with vehemence, never allowed the mantle of guru to be placed on his shoulders."

The former head of the Missionary Brothers of Charity was a simple yet sophisticated man, Fr Day said. "At 23 he fell in love with God and through bad days and good he never took his eyes off God," he said. "(He) did this so effortlessly that he has been able to cajole all of us to have a shot at doing the same, but always in our own way."

Fr Day said that he, like others, had been influenced by Br Andrew's "humour, commonsense and idealism ... and by the advice given in brief meetings over many years as our paths crossed in India, Hong Kong and the Philippines."

Br Geoff, another Australian former general of the Missionary Brothers of Charity, flew to Melbourne from India and represented the current head of the Order, Br Tesudas, at the funeral. Br Tesudas was stranded in Africa.

Br Geoff said Mother Teresa saw Br Andrew "as

material poverty, but brokenness, pain and tragedy offered to God (could) become a way for God to do good things in life," he said.

Br Andrew also showed an appreciation for the little things and what God could do through ordinary people in ordinary situations, Br Geoff said.

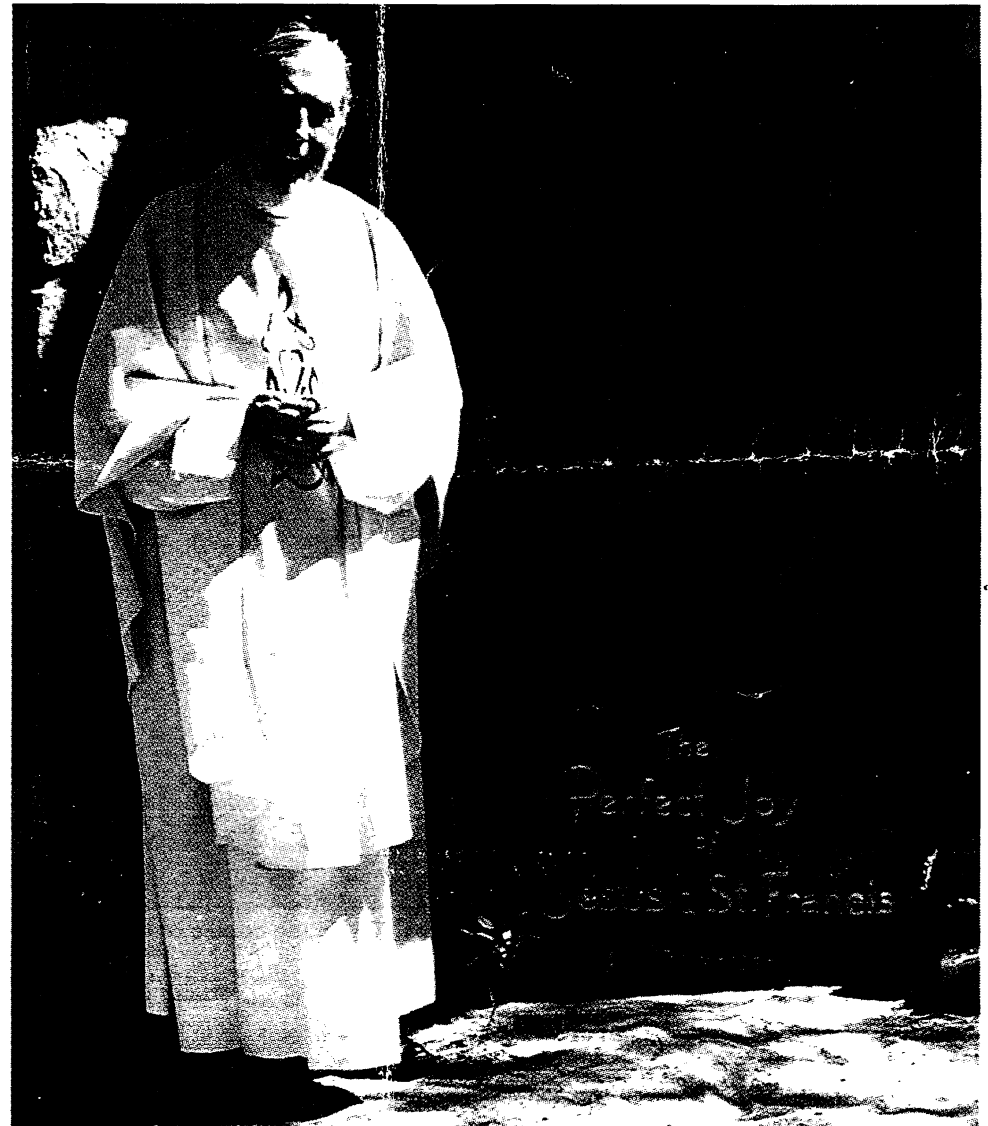
The Missionary Brothers of Charity carry out similar work to the sisters, working with leprosy sufferers, in homes for the dying and with alcoholics, the abandoned and those who have nobody to care for them.

The Order has approximately 370 brothers, with 40 houses in India and another 28 abroad.

Br Andrew was the religious name of Ian Travers-Ball. He died of cancer on October 4 at the Melbourne house run by the Missionaries of Charity sisters. He was 72.

In accordance with his wishes, news of his death was not published until after his funeral on October 6. He died on the feast of St Francis of Assisi, for whom he had great devotion. It was also the 50th anniversary of the founding of Missionaries of Charity.

Sr Dorothy said Br



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Sr Dorothy, the Missionaries of Charity superior in Australia, described Br Andrew as "a deeply spiritual, humble man".

At the Mass of Thanksgiving for Br Andrew's life, held at Sacred Heart Parish in Melbourne, Australian Jesuit provincial, Fr Daven Day, said Br Andrew always fought being tagged as a holy man.

the answer to her prayers". The Brothers of Charity "were under his inspiration and guidance for 20 years, always with Mother's spirit, but she left it in his hands".

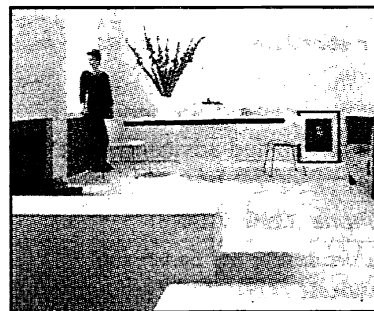
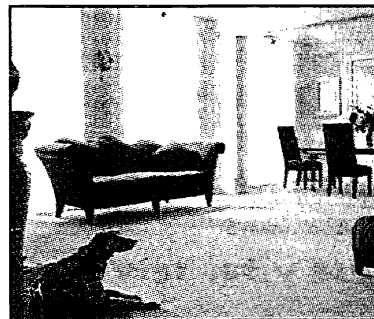
Br Geoff said one of the main messages of Br Andrew's life was how poverty could be people's greatest wealth.

He saw "how not only

Andrew had been so busy in recent times giving retreats and conferences that, despite not feeling well, he had not consulted a doctor. He came to the missionaries' home September 23 and the sisters persuaded him to see a doctor. After the consultation, he learned he was suffering from advanced stomach cancer, she said. **CNS**



(Above) Mother Teresa pictured on a postage stamp jointly produced by the Italian and Albanian governments in 1998 in her honour  
(Above right) Australia's Brother Andrew, who founded – and led – the Brothers of Charity with Mother Teresa while still a novice



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## Fr Ian Travers-Ball SJ / Brother Andrew

**Brother Andrew, co-founder with Mother Teresa of the Missionaries of Charity Brothers was originally Fr Ian Travers-Ball SJ who received permission from his Jesuit superiors to join the Brothers in 1966. On making final vows in 1968 he formally left the Jesuits and for twenty years held the post of General Servant of the Missionaries of Charity Brothers during years of rapid expansion in India and throughout the world.**

**Judging that the Brothers were now on firm foundations, Brother Andrew left them in 1988 and as a diocesan priest incardinated in the Calcutta Archdiocese he roved the world and touched the lives of hundreds of people through the ministry of retreats and spiritual direction. His was now a solitary lifestyle characterised by a simplicity of life and willing dependence of Divine Providence.**

**Brother Andrew finished his earthly journey on the Feast of St Francis of Assisi on 4 October 2000 after a brief illness during which he was cared for by the Missionaries of Charity Sisters in their Melbourne Home of Compassion. Having learnt that his sickness was terminal he put all his affairs in order and was ready to meet his God.**

**In a short reflection on the life of Brother Andrew at his requiem Fr Daven Day SJ Australian Jesuit Provincial, said that Brother Andrew always fought the idea that he was a holy man. His rejection of the holiness tag was not something pious. He rejected all forms of showiness and never allowed the mantle of guru to be placed on his shoulders.**

**His requiem was likewise very simple at his own request, no information in papers till after the burial, no homily at the requiem and burial in the family grave at Boroondara cemetery. He asked Fr Daven Day, close friend and fellow Jesuit novice at Watsonia in 1952, to celebrate his requiem. May his gentle soul rest in God's loving care, at peace in His hands.**

**As Rev Ian Travers-Ball SJ Brother Andrew sailed for India and our Australian Jesuit Mission in Hazaribag Bihar on 1 December 1954 as a member of the fourth group of Australian Jesuits to be missioned to India. Last year he re-visited India briefly and below we print some reflections he made on this his final trip.**

## Brother Ar

Last year when I was invited to visit India I readily agreed to go without thinking too much about what it would entail.

As the day to leave approached, I was thinking it was a pilgrimage arranged by God. I was surprised that I had made it a full two months, but I think that God arranged that too.

I felt a bit apprehensive: my age now and health, the turbulence in India, my affection for familiar things and people in Australia.

A few days before leaving, I saw it in prayer as a call, a mission—as in 1954 when I first went to India leaving family and country for good, as was the understanding at that time. I don't know how much I realised back then what a step it was. But now I could see it as a call to let go of everything, to let go of things and people who are dear to me.

However, I could pray: 'If it is You, Lord, that is everything. I can go joyfully in and with You. I can entrust everyone and everything into Your loving care—with joyful hope, faith and love. And, Mary, my Mother, you are Queen of this mission.'

As I prepared to leave, I saw that I did not need to take much—just a change of clothes, no books or papers—not even pre-worked out ideas or talks. I could go freely with Lady Poverty.

There was no time for acclimatising. Immediately on arrival the heat, the humidity, the pull of bones and body, the crush of crowds was heavy upon me. I came to India for a sort of romantic spiritual experience and reminiscing, but the weight of the flesh was a large part of the journey from the beginning, it was a call to trust and surrender—to let go.

Current concerns in Australia disappeared instantly: football finals, government elections, public issues, etc. Here was a heavy humid purging. But all would be well. All was in His Hands.

Beautiful loving things can also be heavy and demanding. There was the overwhelming love of the Brothers and Sisters of Mother Teresa. One has to respond to loving welcome and expectations and the endless requests for talks and sharing. It is beautiful, privileged grace to be loved, but also a demanding and even exhausting call. Happily I could be thankful for it, and I could wait on Him and trust.

On my second day I was invited to celebrate Mass at the tomb of Mother Teresa on her second anniversary. This was pilgrimage. But not much time for quiet reflection in that pressing, sweating crowd and a sermon to be preached.

But the power of that place and moment was real indeed. So many people thronging to her tomb, parents putting sick babies on the tomb, ordinary people with their needs and their hopes and their suffering coming to Mother Teresa, brought to their God by her continuing life-giving spirit. Many were Hindus and Muslims.

*With my experience of the heaviness of my bones and flesh in the heat, the humidity the mosquitoes and the amoebic dysentery, I discovered anew the exile, the waiting on the dawn, I discovered patience as an opening to hope and love for the One who loves me unto life.*

Later, on quieter days I would spend a little time silently at her tomb. Quieter days, but always coming and going were a

# Andrew's: My Poverty in India



few parents with sick children, Hindus with their prayers and hopes, young men and women with the hunger of their heart, the poor and wounded, nuns and curious tourists.

As I sat there I listened for what Mother would say to me; and it came clearly: it was and is Jesus in Mother Teresa coming through so powerfully after her death. It is the Risen Jesus alive in her and in those who come here.

I could see out the door across the courtyard to the parlour where many times she and I talked. Now I could realise the tremendous gift and grace of a saint upon me. Mother Teresa is very much alive after her death—which is one of the marks of great saints.

Staying in the Brothers' houses and close to the poor, the wounded, and visiting the sisters too, I was struck by the serenity of the poor and by the continuing enduring dedication and love of the Sisters and Brothers and many co-workers and volunteers. So many lives supported, touched and inspired.

This is the miracle of Jesus present, of the Spirit. It is very strong. It is the Church everywhere. Human weakness evident? Yes. But undeniable life and love that has to be pondered in silence, for it is so easily overlooked. St Luke says of Mary in the days of her Son's infancy: 'She treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.' It is enlightening and freeing to ponder the things of God.

That serenity of the poor and broken also calls for a real prayerful pondering. It is in striking contrast to the anger, the resentment, the depression of many sophisticated people.

These 'poor' ones are somehow graced to know that life here on earth is an exile, a waiting. That it is the *journey* out of Egypt—but not yet fully the Promised Land. The scholar, the independent, the self-reliant has to surrender their mind and will to this. But pride gets in the way... 'Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn and weep.' That is the strange promise of Jesus.

With my experience of the heaviness of my bones and flesh in the heat, the humidity the mosquitoes and the amoebic dysentery, I discovered anew the exile, the waiting on the dawn. I discovered patience as an opening to hope and love for the One who loves me unto life.

It wasn't all serene for me as I journeyed on amid the beauty of the people I was with and the faith that the Living God has

given me in Himself.

Jean Vanier has long been saying that the poor reveal to me my own poverty. The background of discomfort I was experiencing highlighted this for me.

I quickly saw how preoccupied I was with myself. Would the dysentery clear up? Would I get malaria from all these mosquito bites? Would I get a seat on this long uncomfortable crowded train journey? Would the floods make it impossible for me to get to the airport and catch my flight to get out of it all.

The experience that God did always provide and work things out only served to humble me more—even if He did constantly give me a run for my money!

One instance stands out. It was an early morning start from a remote house of the Brothers with their lepers to catch an early train to Calcutta. As usual I was preoccupied with my own convenience and the arrangements. Everything of course worked out— even a seat, broken though it was.

Stepping out of the train on to the platform on arrival, right there at my feet, lying on a rag of a blanket was an old woman breathing her last, flies around her open gasping mouth. And I recognised the misery of my preoccupation with myself.

The Brother who was with me arranged for her to be taken to their hospice for the dying where she died on a bed, bathed and comforted a little. That was the grace for her at the end. The grace for me? In her death she revealed to me my own great poverty which is an amazing mystery and a deep liberation from self-delusion.

I have long been struck by the parallel between physical bodily conditions and the spiritual. This is clear in the healings and miracles of Jesus.

The blindness of the beggar corresponds to the spiritual blindness of us all. The hunger of the crowd that He satisfies is the spiritual hunger that we feel. The life that he restores to the dead Lazarus is the new life he gives to us in the death of our sin and selfishness.

There is a vitality in India. Here is a people of the future—if western materialism doesn't overtake them.

One morning going to Howrah station I saw the teeming crowds—rickshaw pullers, people carrying huge loads, people rushing and pushing in the heat and humidity on their business. I was feeling weak and discomforted myself. And I thought, Why don't they just sit down and wait for death?

Yet they struggle fiercely to live and to support their families. In Australia we look to anti-life measures: abortion, euthanasia, redundancies, economic rationalism that dispenses with people.

Everywhere in India you find *the sense of the sacred*. God is not denied or excluded. At times it may be naive or distorted. But people know God; and so they live on in the incredible conditions of our life.

In these two months I experienced the suffering of the poor and the deprived in India. I saw the human weaknesses in the Brothers, in the Church, in Indian society—and in myself.

But I was also touched by the loving, living Spirit of God in the Indian poor, in the Brothers—even in my own poor self.

It is all the mystery of God. Without Him there is nothing. ■